



JESUS AND CHILDREN (BIRTH–AGE 12)

Sunday, February 20, 2011

Guest Writer for This Unit: Mark Jefferson. Mark is a PhD student at Emory University in Atlanta, GA.

The unit you are viewing, Jesus and Children (Birth–Age 12), is a compact unit. This means that it does not have a supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided scriptural text(s) that we suggest for this moment on the calendar along with a sermon outline, suggested links, books, articles, songs, and videos. For additional information see Jesus and Children (Birth–Age 12) in the archive of the Lectionary for 2009 and 2010. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

In 2010 Imani Jones wrote in the Jesus and Children (Birth–Age 12) unit:

Jesus has always been closely connected to children. From infants to older children, Jesus has extended himself to them in love, time and time again. He did not strategically maneuver his ministry on earth away from children—rather, Jesus’ ministry was inclusive of children. Jesus spoke to children, healed children, blessed children, cast demons from children, raised children from the dead, and welcomed children into his warm embrace.

Maybe Jesus can so easily welcome children, because he has personal memories of his own childhood experiences. He knew what it was like to be misunderstood and rebuked by his parents. The reaction he received, at age twelve, from his parents when he remained in the temple in Jerusalem without their consent makes this clear. Perhaps Jesus is so welcoming to children because of their innocence, uncluttered faith, and humility. Finally, it could be that Jesus has the ability to see inherent worth and value in everyone, especially children, and, therefore, welcomes children just as they are.

Historically, the African American church has followed Jesus’ example of welcoming children. Not simply regarded as invisible extensions of their parents, children have been encouraged to actively participate in the worship life of the African American community, for they are living, breathing manifestations of God’s creative and ongoing activity in the world....

With these words in mind, we provide the sermonic outline for this moment on the calendar.

II. Jesus and Children (Birth–Age 12): Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text(s): Matthew 18: 1–6 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 1) At the time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? (v. 2) He called a child, whom he put among them (v. 3) and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (v. 4) Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (v. 5) Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. (v. 6) If anyone of you puts a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believes in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.

B. Possible Titles

- i. Finding the Fountain of Youth
- ii. Life Lessons from Little Ones
- iii. The Narrow Door into the Kingdom

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

In any text there can be several words or phrases that require significant exegetical inquiry. One exegetical inquiry raised by this text is the difference the text makes between little ones and children. The Greek word *paidion* means “infant or young child.” We find this word in verses 2, 4, and 5. This word differs from the word *mikros*, which means “small, little.” The difference between the two is also seen in the context of the verse. In verses 2 through 5, Jesus is explicitly talking about children, but in verse 6 he broadens the conversation to little ones which many say makes a reference to young disciples due to the following words “who believe in me.” Jesus uses children as an illustration to highlight how disciples should behave toward those who are defenseless, young and impressionable.

III. Introduction

In the classic book *Alice in Wonderland*, written by Carroll Lewis, we are introduced to a child named Alice.¹ Alice, who sits lazily along the river, sees a rabbit with a pocket watch and a vest scurrying along. Curious about the sight, she follows him into a rabbit hole seemingly unconcerned about how she will get out. As she falls in this hole, she notices cupboards that say strange things. She finally stops falling and sees the rabbit quickly leave her by entering a small door. She sees a key on the table and opens the door that the rabbit entered and sees a beautiful garden. She is further intrigued. There is a container labeled “DRINK ME,” the contents of which would make her small enough to fit in the door. She is faced with the dilemma of staying large and being unable to pursue what captivates her attention or reducing her size and following who she was seeking into a new world.

Alice is not the only one who was seemingly too big to embrace a new world, a new kingdom, a new opportunity. In Matthew 18, the disciples are faced with this same question but with greater spiritual ramifications. The disciples asked Jesus, “Who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” This concern for status and importance came from adult concerns about power. Jesus, realizing that the disciples were thinking too “big” for the narrow door they had to enter, brought in the perfect person to show them how to enter. Jesus called a child from the outside of the conversation into the center and essentially said, “Unless you become like this child, you won’t enter the kingdom.” The child in the text can teach us how to enter the narrow door of the Kingdom. We can enter the door by:

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – Changing Our Direction

Jesus tells the disciples that they are heading in the wrong direction. They must change direction in order to enter the kingdom.

- a. The seriousness of changing (Truly I tell you);
- b. We must change (... unless you change); and
- c. We must go back in order to go forward (... become like children)

Move/Point Two – Changing Our Affections

Jesus saw the disciple's desire for position. He offered them a new desire for which to aim.

- a. Seek godly humility (Whoever becomes humble);
- b. Seek God's approval (... is the greatest); and
- c. Seek God's way (... the kingdom of heaven)

Move /Point Three – Changing Our Reception

As male adults, receiving other esteemed company was not a problem but a privilege. However, children were on the fringes of society. Jesus says we should accept them, because we also receive him by doing this.

- a. Open Invitation (Whoever);
- b. Open Registration (...welcomes in my name); and
- c. Opportunity for Christ Presence (...welcomes me)

V. Challenge

Many of us stand at the door of opportunity, the precipice of potential, the threshold of God's will for us, and are we are fearful. We do not shrink, bend, or cower in order to do great things but we actually puff ourselves up.

When I played football in college, our Strength and Conditioning coach taught us how to properly do a squat. Because many on the team thought they already knew how they ignored him. Many of them did fine with lighter weights but fizzled out as the weight increased. He placed 500 pounds on the bar and asked who wanted to try. I did. I walked to the bar and did it. People wondered how someone 120 pounds lighter than them lifted all that weight. Easy! I did not try to lift from my back. I dropped down low so I could evenly distribute the weight. They operated too high and I wasn't afraid to get low.

My sisters and brothers, don't be afraid to get low. Don't be afraid to take the narrow door. Don't be afraid to do what others won't. Don't fear failing at noble pursuits, fear not having a pursuit at which to fail. I would have rather failed lifting the heavy weight than to have succeeded in lifting way less. God is calling us to get low in order to lift His name; He said, "If I be lifted up, I'll draw all people unto me." I'm willing to get low, become like a child, in order to make my Heavenly Father happy!

VI. Illustration(s)

Roses That Make You Bleed

Many have wondered how something as beautiful as God's grace could be so painful. How can something as effervescent as the grace of God cause me to hurt so badly? Grace is like a husband who wants to show his wife how much he loves her. So, he buys his wife a box of freshly cut roses in a box wrapped with a beautiful bow. He gives her the box and her eyes start beaming and her heart starts palpitating. She can't wait to open the box. She can hardly untie the bow fast enough, she opens the box and she sees the beautiful roses. She smells the lovely fragrance from the roses. In her excitement she reaches in the box and grabs the roses and, unfortunately, she grabs them by the stem. Immediately, pain shoots up her arm, blood runs out her hand.

Something so beautiful yet so painful! Now she has a choice. She can throw the roses to the ground and say, "Rose I reject you because you caused me to hurt." Moreover, she could be angry with her husband and say, "Joker if you really loved me you would have taken the time to shave the thorns off the stems." But she does neither. Instead, she continues to hold the roses by the stem despite the pain, because she knows that the intent of the giver was not to hurt her but to show her how much he loved her. My question for you today is can God hold you by the stem?

— From the sermon *Grace for Grown-ups*.
Delivered in Macon, Georgia, by Maurice Watson

This illustration is from the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary.

See the Sermon Illustrations section for additional illustrations that you may wish to use in presenting a sermon for this moment on the liturgical calendar.

VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in This Passage

Sounds: The initial chatter of disciples, the sudden hush as Jesus spoke, the slight murmuring of people as Jesus invited the children in the middle of the conversation, animals chattering, the tender but firm voice of Jesus correcting their desire for greatness;

Sights: People gathering, Jesus in the midst of the crowd, a child (possibly children) on the outside of the crowd of adults, the tattered clothing of those who pressed together to hear Jesus speaking, the unfettered ambition that flamed in the eyes of the disciples as they waited to find out who was the greatest, the surprise and tender awe that the child had upon his or her face as Jesus showed the crowd someone like this child is great; and

Colors: The varying hues of brown skin of the people, the radiant but unobtrusive sun shine, and the green of the intermittent patches of grass surrounding the town.

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Hymn(s)

- Jesus Loves the Little Children. By C. H. Woolston
Online location: <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/j/e/jesloves.htm> accessed 2 December 2010
- Jesus Loves Me. By Anna Bartlett Warner
This well-known children's hymn was composed in 1860 by Anna B. Warner, after Anna's sister Susan had asked her to write a song for a Sunday school teacher who wanted to cheer a dying boy. Later, David Rutherford McGuire added stanzas two and three. The song first appeared in the Anna B. Warner novel, Say and Seal. In 1862, William B. Bradbury composed the music and added the refrain.

B. Well-Known Song(s)

- The Greatest Love of All. By Whitney Houston
Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvPYXHM94DQ&feature=related> accessed 2 December 2010
- I'm Blessed. By the Mississippi Children Choir
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fjd9OKFvUgU&feature=related> accessed 2 December 2010; Lyrics online location: <http://www.lyricstime.com/mississippi-children-s-choir-i-m-blessed-lyrics.html> accessed 2 December 2010

C. Spiritual(s)

- Walk Together Children. Traditional. Sung by Clayton Williams. Arr. Moses Hogan Sung at the Bethel A.M.E. Church annual Lay Organization prayer brunch. Dr. Stanley Walden accompanist. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9o15fvX2T3g> accessed 8 December 2010

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005–2010)

- Brighter Day. By Kirk Franklin
Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMryIz0fg9s> accessed 2 December 2010
- Brighter Day. performed by the Surprise Hands of Hope deaf ministry
Online location: http://wn.com/Gospel_Music_for_the_Deaf_Community accessed 2 December 2010
- Shake the Devil Off. By Dorothy Norwood
Sung by the Metropolitan Baptist Church Cherub Choir (ages 3–5). Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOoU-gbAXqE> accessed 3 December 2010.
- You Are the Shepard. By Keith and Kristyn Getty
The African Children's Choir featuring the children of Nkomazi. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5ThwVGrt80&feature=fvw> accessed 3 December 2010

You can view Lectionary worship units for Jesus and Children (Birth–Age 12) in the 2008, 2009, and 2010 archive to find additional songs and suggestions for planning a worship service for this liturgical moment.

IX. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

- “Christian Hope Baptist Church’s Children’s MIME Ministry performing Kirk Franklin’s “More Than I Can Bear.” Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fawCwBN3AY> accessed 2 December 2010.
- Children Praise Dance ages 4–7 perform to “We Must Praise.” By J. Moss. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gixPhq-DPc&feature=related> accessed 2 December 2010
- Victory Outreach Dance Ministry of Los Angeles ages 10–13 perform to “Set the Atmosphere.” By Kurt Carr. Online location: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0I_84av9IvA accessed 2 December 2010

X. Books to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Jesus and Children

- The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation. Johnson, Timothy L. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2007.
- The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings, 3rd edition. Ehrman, Bart D. New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2004.
- Purpose Driven Youth Ministry. Fields, Doug. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.
- Learning While Black: Creating Educational Excellence for African American Children. Hale, Janice. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

XI. Links to Helpful Websites for Jesus and the Children (Birth–Age 12)

- “Disabled Children in the Church.” Wingate, Karen. Inside the Classroom. 13 August 2010. Article about including disabled children into church services and activities.
- “Life can be tough when you're a kid. I Want to ask you a favor—please talk with your kids.” Staal, Erin. 27 June 2008. Today’s Children’s Ministry.com. Online location: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/childrensministry/servingfamilies/iwanttoaskyouafavor.html> accessed 8 December 2010. Inspirational advice from Erin Staal, age 11, who regularly volunteers in children's ministry as part of a worship team and in the Toddlers room.

- See various free “Bible Activities” and “Sunday School Lessons” for ages 0-12. Click the links at Children’s Ministry. Online location: <http://childrensministry.com/sunday-school-lessons/birth-2-years> accessed 8 December 2010
- VBS “Praise Package” from Abingdon Press is a heritage-based Christian education curriculum that will have your community celebrating the saving grace of Jesus Christ with head, heart, hands, feet, and SOUL!! Through Bible study, crafts, skits, movement, contemporary music, and well-loved hymns and songs of the Black Church, Praise Party will create passionate worship that truly makes disciples for Jesus Christ. Online location: <http://www.abingdonpressvbs.com/praise-party/overview.php> accessed 8 December 2010
- “101 Ways that Pastors and Parishioners affirm leadership in a Child or Youth in Worship.” North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. Online location: <http://www.northalabamaumc.org/pages/detail/1358> accessed 8 December 2010

Note

1. Carroll, Lewis. Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (aka Alice in Wonderland). 1865. Public Domain at Project Gutenberg online location: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19033> accessed 8 December 2010